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„ Forks	12 6 „	16 6 „	1 5 0 „	Soup „	6 6 „	8 0 „	11 0 „
Tea Spoons	5 6 „	8 0 „	13 6 „	Sugar Tongs.....	1 3 „	1 9 „	3 0 „
Salt Ditto	6 0 „	12 0 Gilt	18 0 gilt.	Fish Knives	5 6 „	8 6 „	12 6 „
Mustard Ditto ...	6 0 „	12 0 Gilt	13 6 „	Skewers	4d. in.		6d. in.



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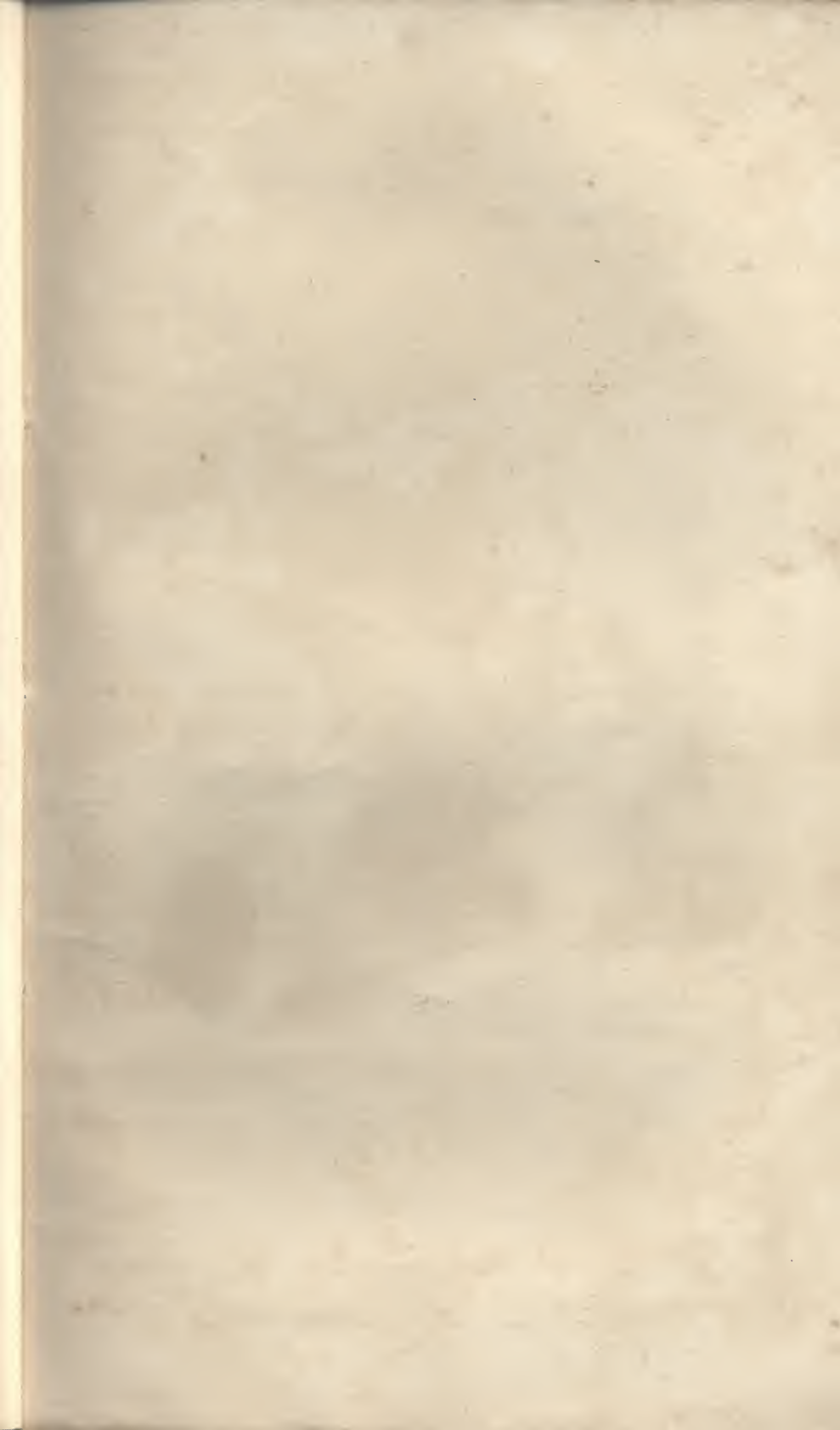
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The dissolution of Partnership.





Mr. Pecksniff on his Mission.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DOES BUSINESS WITH THE HOUSE OF ANTHONY CHUZZLEWIT AND SON,
FROM WHICH ONE OF THE PARTNERS RETIRES UNEXPECTEDLY.

CHANGE begets change. Nothing propagates so fast. If a man habituated to a narrow circle of cares and pleasures, out of which he seldom travels, step beyond it, though for never so brief a space, his departure from the monotonous scene on which he has been an actor of importance, would seem to be the signal for instant confusion. As if, in the gap he had left, the wedge of change were driven to the head, rending what was a solid mass to fragments; things cemented and held together by the usages of years, burst asunder in as many weeks. The mine which Time has slowly dug beneath familiar objects, is sprung in an instant; and what was rock before, becomes but sand and dust.

Most men at one time or other have proved this in some degree. The extent to which the natural laws of change asserted their supremacy in that limited sphere of action which Martin had deserted, shall be faithfully set down in these pages.

"What a cold spring it is!" whimpered old Anthony, drawing near the evening fire. "It was a warmer season, sure, when I was young!"

"You needn't go scorching your clothes into holes, whether it was or not," observed the amiable Jonas, raising his eyes from yesterday's newspaper. "Broadcloth ain't so cheap as that comes to."

"A good lad!" cried the father, breathing on his cold hands, and feebly chafing them against each other. "A prudent lad! He never delivered himself up to the vanities of dress. No, no!"

"I don't know but I would though, mind you, if I could do it for nothing," said his son, as he resumed the paper.

"Ah!" chuckled the old man. "If, indeed!—But it's very cold."

"Let the fire be!" cried Mr. Jonas, stopping his honoured parent's hand in the use of the poker. "Do you mean to come to want in your old age, that you take to wasting now?"

"There's not time for that, Jonas," said the old man.

"Not time for what?" bawled his heir.

"For me to come to want. I wish there was!"

"You always were as selfish an old blade as need be," said Jonas, in a voice too low for him to hear, and looking at him with an angry frown. "You act up to your character. You wouldn't mind coming to want, wouldn't you? I dare say you wouldn't. And your own flesh and blood might come to want too, might they, for anything you cared? Oh you precious old flint!"

After this dutiful address, he took his tea-cup in his hand—for that meal was in progress, and the father and son and Chuffey were partakers of it. Then, looking steadfastly at his father, and stopping now and then to carry a spoonful of tea to his lips, he proceeded in the same tone, thus:

angrily. "What do you mean by coming up to town in this way, and taking one unawares? It's precious odd a man can't read the—the newspaper in his own office without being startled out of his wits by people coming in without notice. Why didn't you knock at the door?"

"So I did Mr. Jonas," answered Pecksniff, "but no one heard me. I was curious," he added in his gentle way as he laid his hand upon the young man's shoulder, "to find out what part of the newspaper interested you so much; but the glass was too dim and dirty."

Jonas glanced in haste at the partition. Well. It wasn't very clean. So far he spoke the truth.

"Was it poetry now?" said Mr. Pecksniff, shaking the forefinger of his right hand with an air of cheerful banter. "Or was it politics? or was it the price of stocks? The main chance Mr. Jonas, the main chance I suspect."

"You ain't far from the truth," answered Jonas, recovering himself and snuffing the candle: "but how the deuce do you come to be in London again? Ecod! it's enough to make a man stare, to see a fellow looking at him all of a sudden, who he thought was sixty or seventy miles away."

"So it is," said Mr. Pecksniff. "No doubt of it my dear Mr. Jonas. For while the human mind is constituted as it is—"

"Oh bother the human mind," interrupted Jonas with impatience, "what have you come up for?"

"A little matter of business," said Mr. Pecksniff, "which has arisen quite unexpectedly."

"Oh!" cried Jonas, "is that all? Well! Here's father in the next room. Hallo father, here's Pecksniff! He gets more addle-pated every day he lives, I do believe," muttered Jonas, shaking his honoured parent roundly. "Don't I tell you Pecksniff's here, stupid-head?"

The combined effects of the shaking and this loving remonstrance soon awoke the old man, who gave Mr. Pecksniff a chuckling welcome, which was attributable in part to his being glad to see that gentleman, and in part to his unfading delight in the recollection of having called him a hypocrite. As Mr. Pecksniff had not yet taken tea (indeed he had but an hour before arrived in London) the remains of the late collation, with a rasher of bacon, were served up for his entertainment; and as Mr. Jonas had a business appointment in the next street, he stepped out to keep it: promising to return before Mr. Pecksniff could finish his repast.

"And now my good sir," said Mr. Pecksniff to Anthony: "now that we are alone, pray tell me what I can do for you. I say alone, because I believe that our dear friend Mr. Chuffey is, metaphysically speaking, a—shall I say a dummy?" asked Mr. Pecksniff with his sweetest smile, and his head very much on one side.

"He neither hears us," replied Anthony, "nor sees us."

"Why then," said Mr. Pecksniff, "I will be bold to say, with the utmost sympathy for his afflictions, and the greatest admiration of those excellent qualities which do equal honour to his head and to his heart, that he *is* what is playfully termed a dummy. You were going to observe, my dear sir—"

"I was not going to make any observation that I know of," replied the old man.

"I was," said Mr. Pecksniff, mildly.

"Oh! *you* were? What was it?"

"That I never," said Mr. Pecksniff, previously rising to see that the door was shut, and arranging his chair when he came back, so that it could not be opened in the least without his immediately becoming aware of the circumstance: "that I never in my life was so astonished as by the receipt of your letter yesterday. That you should do me the honor to wish to take counsel with me on any matter, amazed me; but that you should desire to do so to the exclusion even of Mr. Jonas, showed an amount of confidence in one to whom you had done a verbal injury—merely a verbal injury, you were anxious to repair—which gratified, which moved, which overcame me."

He was always a glib speaker, but he delivered this short address very glibly; having been at some pains to compose it outside the coach.

Although he paused for a reply, and truly said that he was there at Anthony's request, the old man sat gazing at him in profound silence and with a perfectly blank face. Nor did he seem to have the least desire or impulse to pursue the conversation, though Mr. Pecksniff looked towards the door, and pulled out his watch, and gave him many other hints that their time was short, and Jonas, if he kept his word, would soon return. But the strangest incident in all this strange behaviour was, that of a sudden—in a moment—so swiftly that it was impossible to trace how, or to observe any process of change—his features fell into their old expression, and he cried, striking his hand passionately upon the table as if no interval at all had taken place:

"Will you hold your tongue, Sir, and let me speak?"

Mr. Pecksniff deferred to him with a submissive bow; and said within himself, "I knew his hand was changed, and that his writing staggered. I said so yesterday. Ahem! Dear me!"

"Jonas is sweet upon your daughter, Pecksniff," said the old man, in his usual tone.

"We spoke of that, if you remember, Sir, at Mrs. Todgers's," replied the courteous architect.

"You needn't speak so loud," retorted Anthony. "I'm not so deaf as that."

Mr. Pecksniff had certainly raised his voice pretty high: not so much because he thought Anthony was deaf, as because he felt convinced that his perceptive faculties were waxing dim: but this quick resentment of his considerate behaviour greatly disconcerted him, and, not knowing what tack to shape his course upon, he made another inclination of the head, yet more submissive than the last.

"I have said," repeated the old man, "that Jonas is sweet upon your daughter."

"A charming girl, sir," murmured Mr. Pecksniff, seeing that he waited for an answer. "A dear girl, Mr. Chuzzlewit, though I say it who should not."

"You know better," cried the old man, advancing his weazen face at least a yard, and starting forward in his chair to do it. "You lie! What, you *will* be a hypocrite, will you?"

"My good sir," Mr. Pecksniff began.

"Don't call me a good sir," retorted Anthony, "and don't claim to be one yourself. If your daughter was what you would have me believe, she wouldn't do for Jonas. Being what she is, I think she will. He might be deceived in a wife. She might run riot, contract debts, and waste his substance. Now when I am dead—"

His face altered so horribly as he said the word, that Mr. Pecksniff really was fain to look another way.

"It will be worse for me to know of such doings, than if I was alive : for to be tormented for getting that together, which even while I suffer for its acquisition is flung into the very kennels of the streets, would be insupportable torture. No," said the old man hoarsely, "let that be saved at least, let there be something gained, and kept fast hold of, when so much is lost."

"My dear Mr. Chuzzlewit," said Pecksniff, "these are unwholesome fancies ; quite unnecessary, sir, quite uncalled for, I am sure. The truth is, my dear sir, that you are not well !"

"Not dying though !" cried Anthony, with something like the snarl of a wild animal. "Not yet ! There are years of life in me. Why, look at him," pointing to his feeble clerk. "Death has no right to leave him standing, and to mow me down."

Mr. Pecksniff was so much afraid of the old man, and so completely taken aback by the state in which he found him, that he had not even presence of mind enough to call up a scrap of morality from the great storehouse within his own breast. Therefore he stammered out that no doubt it was, in fairness and decency, Mr. Chuffey's turn to expire ; and that from all he had heard of Mr. Chuffey, and the little he had the pleasure of knowing of that gentleman, personally, he felt convinced in his own mind that he would see the propriety of expiring with as little delay as possible.

"Come here !" said the old man, beckoning him to draw nearer. "Jonas will be my heir, Jonas will be rich, and a great catch for you. You know that. Jonas is sweet upon your daughter."

"I know that too," thought Mr. Pecksniff, "for you have said it often enough."

"He might get more money than with her," said the old man, "but she will help him to take care of what they have. She is not too young or heedless, and comes of a good hard griping stock. But don't you play too fine a game. She only holds him by a thread ; and if you draw it too tight (I know his temper) it'll snap. Bind him when he's in the mood, Pecksniff ; bind him. You're too deep. In your way of leading him on, you'll leave him miles behind. Bah, you man of oil, have I no eyes to see how you have angled with him from the first?"

"Now I wonder," thought Mr. Pecksniff, looking at him with a wistful face, "whether this is all he has to say !"

Old Anthony rubbed his hands and muttered to himself ; complained again that he was cold ; drew his chair before the fire ; and, sitting with his back to Mr. Pecksniff, and his chin sunk down upon his breast, was, in another minute, quite regardless or forgetful of his presence.

Uncouth and unsatisfactory as this short interview had been, it had furnished Mr. Pecksniff with a hint which, supposing nothing further were imparted to him, repaid the journey up, and home again. For the good gentleman had never (for want of an opportunity) dived into the depths of Mr. Jonas's nature; and any recipe for catching such a son-in-law (much more, one written on a leaf out of his own father's book) was worth the having. In order that he might lose no chance of improving so fair an opportunity by allowing Anthony to fall asleep before he had finished all he had to say, Mr. Pecksniff, in the disposal of the refreshments on the table—a work to which he now applied himself in earnest—resorted to many ingenious contrivances for attracting his attention, such as coughing, sneezing, clattering the teacups, sharpening the knives, dropping the loaf, and so forth. But all in vain, for Mr. Jonas returned, and Anthony had said no more.

"What! my father asleep again?" he cried, as he hung up his hat, and cast a look at him. "Ah! and snoring. Only hear!"

"He snores very deep," said Mr. Pecksniff.

"Snores deep?" repeated Jonas. "Yes; let him alone for that. He'll snore for six, at any time."

"Do you know, Mr. Jonas," said Pecksniff, "that I think your father is—don't let me alarm you—breaking?"

"Oh, is he though," replied Jonas, with a shake of the head which expressed the closeness of his dutiful observation. "Ecod, you don't know how tough he is. He ain't upon the move yet."

"It struck me that he was changed, both in his appearance and manner," said Mr. Pecksniff.

"That's all you know about it," returned Jonas, seating himself with a melancholy air. "He never was better than he is now. How are they all at home? How's Charity?"

"Blooming, Mr. Jonas, blooming."

"And the other one—how's she?"

"Volatile trifler!" said Mr. Pecksniff, fondly musing. "She is well—she is well. Roving from parlour to bed-room, Mr. Jonas, like the bee; skimming from post to pillar, like the butterfly; dipping her young beak into our currant wine, like the humming-bird! Ah! were she a little less giddy than she is; and had she but the sterling qualities of Cherry, my young friend!"

"Is she so very giddy, then?" asked Jonas.

"Well, well!" said Mr. Pecksniff, with great feeling; "let me not be hard upon my child. Beside her sister Cherry she appears so. A strange noise that, Mr. Jonas!"

"Something wrong in the clock, I suppose," said Jonas, glancing towards it. "So the other one ain't your favourite, ain't she?"

The fond father was about to reply, and had already summoned into his face a look of the intensest sensibility, when the sound he had already noticed was repeated.

"Upon my word, Mr. Jonas, that is a very extraordinary clock," said Pecksniff.

It would have been, if it had made the noise which startled them:

but another kind of time-piece was fast running down, and from that the sound proceeded. A scream from Chuffey, rendered a hundred times more loud and formidable by his silent habits, made the house ring from roof to cellar ; and, looking round, they saw Anthony Chuzzlewit extended on the floor, with the old clerk upon his knees beside him.

He had fallen from his chair in a fit, and lay there, battling for each gasp of breath, with every shrivelled vein and sinew starting in its place, as it were bent on bearing witness to his age, and sternly pleading with Nature against his recovery. It was frightful to see how the principle of life, shut up within his withered frame, fought like a strong devil, mad to be released, and rent its ancient prison-house. A young man in the fulness of his vigour, struggling with so much strength of desperation, would have been a dismal sight ; but an old, old, shrunken body, endowed with preternatural might, and giving the lie in every motion of its every limb and joint to its enfeebled aspect, was a hideous spectacle indeed.

They raised him up, and fetched a surgeon with all haste, who bled the patient, and applied some remedies ; but the fits held him so long, that it was past midnight when they got him—quiet now, but quite unconscious and exhausted—into bed.

“Don’t go,” said Jonas, putting his ashy lips to Mr. Pecksniff’s ear, and whispering across the bed. “It was a mercy you were present when he was taken ill. Some one might have said it was my doing.”

“*Your* doing!” cried Mr. Pecksniff.

“I don’t know but they might,” he replied, wiping the moisture from his white face. “People say such things. How does he look now?”

Mr. Pecksniff shook his head.

“I used to joke, you know,” said Jonas : “but I—I never wished him dead. Do you think he’s very bad?”

“The doctor said he was. You heard,” was Mr. Pecksniff’s answer.

“Ah ! but he might say that to charge us more, in case of his getting well,” said Jonas. “You mustn’t go away, Pecksniff. Now it’s come to this, I wouldn’t be without a witness for a thousand pound.”

Chuffey said not a word, and heard not a word. He had sat himself down in a chair at the bedside, and there he remained, motionless ; except that he sometimes bent his head over the pillow, and seemed to listen. He never changed in this. Though once in the dreary night Mr. Pecksniff, having dozed, awoke with a confused impression that he had heard him praying, and strangely mingling figures—not of speech, but arithmetic—with his broken prayers.

Jonas sat there, too, all night : not where his father could have seen him, had his consciousness returned, but hiding, as it were, behind him, and only reading how he looked in Mr. Pecksniff’s eyes. *He*, the coarse upstart, who had ruled the house so long—that craven cur, who was afraid to move, and shook so that his very shadow fluttered on the wall !

It was broad, bright, stirring day when, leaving the old clerk to watch him, they went down to breakfast. People hurried up and down

the street ; windows and doors were opened ; thieves and beggars took their usual posts ; workmen bestirred themselves ; tradesmen set forth their shops ; bailiffs and constables were on the watch ; all kinds of human creatures strove, in their several ways, as hard to live, as the one sick old man who combated for every grain of sand in his fast-emptying glass, as eagerly as if it were an empire.

"If anything happens, Pecksniff," said Jonas, "you must promise me to stop here till it's all over. You shall see that I do what's right."

"I know that you will do what's right, Mr. Jonas," said Pecksniff.

"Yes, yes, but I won't be doubted. No one shall have it in his power to say a syllable against me," he returned. "I know how people will talk.—Just as if he wasn't old, or I had the secret of keeping him alive!"

Mr. Pecksniff promised that he would remain, if circumstances should render it in his esteemed friend's opinion desirable ; and they were finishing their meal in silence, when suddenly an apparition stood before them, so ghastly to the view, that Jonas shrieked aloud, and both recoiled in horror.

Old Anthony, dressed in his usual clothes, was in the room—beside the table. He leaned upon the shoulder of his solitary friend ; and on his livid face, and on his horny hands, and in his glassy eyes, and traced by an eternal finger in the very drops of sweat upon his brow, was one word—Death.

He spoke to them—in something of his own voice too, but sharpened and made hollow, like a dead man's face. What he would have said, God knows. He seemed to utter words, but they were such as man had never heard. And this was the most fearful circumstance of all, to see him standing there, gabbling in an unearthly tongue.

"He's better now," said Chuffey. "Better now. Let him sit in his old chair, and he'll be well again. I told him not to mind. I said so, yesterday."

They put him in his easy-chair, and wheeled it near the window ; then setting open the door, exposed him to the free current of morning air. But not all the air that is, nor all the winds that ever blew 'twixt Heaven and Earth, could have brought new life to him. Plunge him to the throat in golden pieces now, and his heavy fingers should not close on one.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE READER IS BROUGHT INTO COMMUNICATION WITH SOME PROFESSIONAL PERSONS, AND SHEDS A TEAR OVER THE FILIAL PIETY OF GOOD MR. JONAS.

MR. PECKSNIFF was in a hackney cabriolet, for Jonas Chuzzlewit had said "Spare no expense." Mankind is evil in its thoughts and in its base constructions, and Jonas was resolved it should not have an inch to stretch into an ell against him. It never should be charged upon his father's son that he had grudged the money for his father's funeral.

Hence, until the obsequies should be concluded, Jonas had taken for his motto "Spend, and spare not!"

Mr. Pecksniff had been to the undertaker, and was now upon his way to another officer in the train of mourning—a female functionary, a nurse, and watcher, and performer of nameless offices about the persons of the dead—whom he had recommended. Her name, as Mr. Pecksniff gathered from a scrap of writing in his hand, was Gamp; her residence in Kingsgate Street, High Holborn. So Mr. Pecksniff, in a hackney cab, was rattling over Holborn stones, in quest of Mrs. Gamp.

This lady lodged at a bird-fancier's; next door but one to the celebrated mutton-pie shop, and directly opposite to the original cat's meat warehouse; the renown of which establishments was duly heralded on their respective fronts. It was a little house, and this was the more convenient; for Mrs. Gamp being, in her highest walk of art, a monthly nurse, or, as her sign-board boldly had it, "Midwife," and lodging in the first-floor-front, was easily assailable at night by pebbles, walking-sticks, and fragments of tobacco pipe: all much more efficacious than the street-door knocker, which was so constructed as to wake the street with ease, and even spread alarms of fire in Holborn, without making the smallest impression on the premises to which it was addressed.

It chanced on this particular occasion that Mrs. Gamp had been up all the previous night, in attendance upon a ceremony to which the *usage of gossips has given that name which expresses, in two syllables*, the curse pronounced on Adam. It chanced that Mrs. Gamp had not been regularly engaged, but had been called in at a crisis, in consequence of her great repute, to assist another professional lady with her advice; and thus it happened that, all points of interest in the case being over, Mrs. Gamp had come home again to the bird-fancier's, and gone to bed. So when Mr. Pecksniff drove up in the hackney cab, Mrs. Gamp's curtains were drawn close, and Mrs. Gamp was fast asleep behind them.

If the bird-fancier had been at home, as he ought to have been, there would have been no great harm in this; but he was out, and his shop was closed. The shutters were down certainly; and in every pane of glass there was at least one tiny bird in a tiny bird-cage, twittering and hopping his little ballet of despair, and knocking his head against the roof; while one unhappy goldfinch who lived outside a red villa with his name on the door, drew the water for his own drinking, and mutely appealed to some good man to drop a farthing's worth of poison in it. Still, the door was shut. Mr. Pecksniff tried the latch, and shook it, causing a cracked bell inside to ring most mournfully; but no one came. The bird-fancier was an easy shaver also, and a fashionable hair-dresser also; and perhaps he had been sent for, express, from the court end of the town, to trim a lord, or cut and curl a lady; but however that might be, there, upon his own ground, he was not; nor was there any more distinct trace of him to assist the imagination of an enquirer, than a professional print or emblem of his calling (much favored in the trade), representing a hair-dresser of easy manners curling a lady of distinguished fashion, in the presence of a patent upright grand piano.

Noting these circumstances, Mr. Pecksniff, in the innocence of his

heart, applied himself to the knocker ; but at the very first double knock, every window in the street became alive with female heads ; and before he could repeat the performance, whole troops of married ladies (some about to trouble Mrs. Gamp themselves, very shortly) came flocking round the steps ; all crying out with one accord, and with uncommon interest, " Knock at the winder, sir, knock at the winder. Lord bless you, don't lose no more time than you can help—knock at the winder ! "

Acting upon this suggestion, and borrowing the driver's whip for the purpose, Mr. Pecksniff soon made a commotion among the first-floor flower-pots, and roused Mrs. Gamp, whose voice—to the great satisfaction of the matrons—was heard to say, " I'm coming. "

" He's as pale as a muffin, " said one lady, in allusion to Mr. Pecksniff.

" So he ought to be, if he's the feelings of a man, " observed another.

A third lady (with her arms folded) said she wished he had chosen any other time for fetching Mrs. Gamp, but it always happened so with *her*.

It gave Mr. Pecksniff much uneasiness to find from these remarks that he was supposed to have come to Mrs. Gamp upon an errand touching—not the close of life, but the other end. Mrs. Gamp herself was under the same impression, for throwing open the window, she cried behind the curtains, as she hastily attired herself—

" Is it Mrs. Perkins ? "

" No ! " returned Mr. Pecksniff, sharply, " nothing of the sort. "

" What, Mr. Whilks ! " cried Mrs. Gamp. " Don't say it's you, Mr. Whilks, and that poor creetur Mrs. Whilks with not even a pin-cushion ready. Don't say it's you, Mr. Whilks ! "

" It isn't Mr. Whilks, " said Pecksniff. " I don't know the man. Nothing of the kind. A gentleman is dead ; and some person being wanted in the house, you have been recommended by Mr. Mould, the undertaker. "

As she was by this time in a condition to appear, Mrs. Gamp, who had a face for all occasions, looked out of window with her mourning countenance, and said she would be down directly. But the matrons took it very ill, that Mr. Pecksniff's mission was of so unimportant a kind ; and the lady with her arms folded rated him in good round terms, signifying that she would be glad to know what he meant by terrifying delicate females " with his corpses ; " and giving it as her opinion that he was quite ugly enough to know better. The other ladies were not at all behind-hand in expressing similar sentiments ; and the children, of whom some scores had now collected, hooted and defied Mr. Pecksniff quite savagely. So when Mrs. Gamp appeared, the unoffending gentleman was glad to hustle her with very little ceremony into the cabriolet, and drive off overwhelmed with popular execration.

Mrs. Gamp had a large bundle with her, a pair of pattens, and a species of gig umbrella ; the latter article in colour like a faded leaf, except where a circular patch of a lively blue had been dexterously let in at the top. She was much flurried by the haste she had made, and

laboured under the most erroneous views of cabriolets, which she appeared to confound with mail-coaches or stage-waggons, inasmuch as she was constantly endeavouring for the first half mile to force her luggage through the little front window, and clamouring to the driver to "put it in the boot." When she was disabused of this idea, her whole being resolved itself into an absorbing anxiety about her pattens, with which she played innumerable games at quoits, on Mr. Pecksniff's legs. It was not until they were close upon the house of mourning that she had enough composure to observe—

"And so the gentleman's dead, sir! Ah! The more's the pity"—she didn't even know his name. "But it's what we must all come to. It's as certain as being born, except that we can't make our calculations as exact. Ah! Poor dear!"

She was a fat old woman, this Mrs. Gamp, with a husky voice and a moist eye, which she had a remarkable power of turning up, and only showing the white of. Having very little neck, it cost her some trouble to look over herself, if one may say so, at those to whom she talked. She wore a very rusty black gown, rather the worse for snuff, and a shawl and bonnet to correspond. In these dilapidated articles of dress she had, on principle, arrayed herself, time out of mind, on such occasions as the present; for this at once expressed a decent amount of veneration for the deceased, and invited the next of kin to present her with a fresher suit of weeds: an appeal so frequently successful, that the very fetch and ghost of Mrs. Gamp, bonnet and all, might be seen hanging up, any hour in the day, in at least a dozen of the second-hand clothes shops about Holborn. The face of Mrs. Gamp—the nose in particular—was somewhat red and swoln, and it was difficult to enjoy her society without becoming conscious of a smell of spirits. Like most persons who have attained to great eminence in their profession, she took to hers very kindly; inasmuch, that setting aside her natural predilections as a woman, she went to a lying-in or a laying-out with equal zest and relish.

"Ah!" repeated Mrs. Gamp; for it was always a safe sentiment in cases of mourning. "Ah dear! When Gamp was summonsed to his long home, and I see him a lying in Guy's Hospital with a penny-piece on each eye, and his wooden leg under his left arm, I thought I should have fainted away. But I bore up."

If certain whispers current in the Kingsgate Street circles had any truth in them, she had indeed borne up surprisingly; and had exerted such uncommon fortitude, as to dispose of Mr. Gamp's remains for the benefit of science. But it should be added, in fairness, that this had happened twenty years ago; and that Mr. and Mrs. Gamp had long been separated, on the ground of incompatibility of temper in their drink.

"You have become indifferent since then, I suppose?" said Mr. Pecksniff. "Use is second nature, Mrs. Gamp."

"You may well say second nature, sir," returned that lady. "One's first ways is to find sich things a trial to the feelings; and so is one's lasting custom. If it wasn't for the nerve a little sip of liquor gives me

(I never was able to do more than taste it) I never could go through with what I sometimes have to do. 'Mrs. Harris,' I says, at the very last case as ever I acted in, which it was but a young person; 'Mrs. Harris,' I says, 'leave the bottle on the chimley-piece, and don't ask me to take none, but let me put my lips to it when I am so disposed, and then I will do what I'm engaged to do, according to the best of my ability.' 'Mrs. Gamp,' she says, in answer, 'if ever there was a sober creetur to be got at eighteen pence a day for working people, and three and six for gentlefolks—night watching,' said Mrs. Gamp, with emphasis, "'being a extra charge—you are that inwalable person.' 'Mrs. Harris,' I says to her, don't name the charge, for if I could afford to lay all my feller creeturs out for nothink, I would gladly do it; sich is the love I bear 'em. But what I always says to them as has the management of matters, Mrs. Harris'"—here she kept her eye on Mr. Pecksniff—"be they gents or be they ladies—is, don't ask me whether I won't take none, or whether I will, but leave the bottle on the chimley piece, and let me put my lips to it when I am so disposed."

The conclusion of this affecting narrative brought them to the house. In the passage they encountered Mr. Mould the undertaker: a little elderly gentleman, bald, and in a suit of black; with a note-book in his hand, a massive gold watch-chain dangling from his fob, and a face in which a queer attempt at melancholy was at odds with a smirk of satisfaction; so that he looked as a man might who, in the very act of smacking his lips over choice old wine, tried to make believe it was physic.

"Well, Mrs. Gamp, and how are *you*, Mrs. Gamp?" said this gentleman, in a voice as soft as his step.

"Pretty well, I thank you, sir," dropping a curtsy.

"You'll be very particular here, Mrs. Gamp. This is not a common case, Mrs. Gamp. Let everything be very nice and comfortable, Mrs. Gamp, if you please," said the undertaker, shaking his head with a solemn air.

"It shall be, sir," she replied, curtseying again. "You knows me of old, sir, I hope."

"I hope so, too, Mrs. Gamp," said the undertaker; "and I think so also." Mrs. Gamp curtseyed again. "This is one of the most impressive cases, sir," he continued, addressing Mr. Pecksniff, "that I have seen in the whole course of my professional experience."

"Indeed, Mr. Mould!" cried that gentleman.

"Such affectionate regret, sir, I never saw. There is no limitation—there is positively no limitation,"—opening his eyes wide, and standing on tiptoe, "in point of expense. I have orders, sir, to put on my whole establishment of mutes; and mutes come very dear, Mr. Pecksniff; not to mention their drink. To provide silver-plated handles of the very best description, ornamented with angels' heads from the most expensive dies. To be perfectly profuse in feathers. In short, sir, to turn out something absolutely gorgeous."

"My friend Mr. Jonas is an excellent man," said Mr. Pecksniff.

"I have seen a good deal of what is filial in my time, sir," retorted

Mould, "and of what is unfilial too. It is our lot. We come into the knowledge of those secrets. But anything so filial as this ; anything so honourable to human nature ; so calculated to reconcile all of us to the world we live in ; never yet came under my observation. It only proves, sir, what was so forcibly observed by the lamented theatrical poet buried—at Stratford—that there is good in everything."

"It is very pleasant to hear you say so, Mr. Mould," observed Pecksniff.

"You are very kind, sir. And what a man Mr. Chuzzlewit was, sir ! Ah ! what a man he was. You may talk of your lord mayors," said Mould, waving his hand at the public in general, "your sheriffs, your common councilmen, your trumpery ; but show me a man in this city who is worthy to walk in the shoes of the departed Mr. Chuzzlewit. No, no," cried Mould, with bitter sarcasm. "Hang 'em up, hang 'em up ; sole 'em and heel 'em, and have 'em ready for his son against he's old enough to wear 'em ; but don't try 'em on yourselves, for they won't fit you. We knew him," said Mould, in the same biting vein, as he pocketed his note-book ; "we knew him, and are not to be caught with chaff. Mr. Pecksniff, sir, good morning."

Mr. Pecksniff returned the compliment ; and Mould, sensible of having distinguished himself, was going away with a brisk smile, when he fortunately remembered the occasion. Quickly becoming depressed again, he sighed ; looked into the crown of his hat, as if for comfort ; put it on without finding any ; and slowly departed.

Mrs. Gamp and Mr. Pecksniff then ascended the staircase ; and the former, having been shown to the chamber in which all that remained of Anthony Chuzzlewit lay covered up, with but one loving heart, and that a halting one, to mourn it, left the latter free to enter the darkened room below, and rejoin Mr. Jonas, from whom he had now been absent nearly two hours.

He found that example to bereaved sons and pattern in the eyes of all performers of funerals, musing over a fragment of writing-paper on the desk, and scratching figures on it with a pen. The old man's chair, and hat, and walking-stick, were removed from their accustomed places, and put out of sight ; the window-blinds, as yellow as November fogs, were drawn down close ; Jonas himself was so subdued, that he could scarcely be heard to speak, and only seen to walk across the room.

"Pecksniff," he said, in a whisper, "you shall have the regulation of it all, mind. You shall be able to tell anybody who talks about it that everything was correctly and freely done. There isn't any one you'd like to ask to the funeral, is there ?"

"No, Mr. Jonas, I think not."

"Because if there is, you know," said Jonas, "ask him. We don't want to make a secret of it."

"No," repeated Mr. Pecksniff, after a little reflection. "I am not the less obliged to you on that account, Mr. Jonas, for your liberal hospitality ; but there really is no one."

"Very well," said Jonas ; "then you, and I, and Chuffey, and the doctor, will be just a coachful. We'll have the doctor, Pecksniff, because

he knows what was the matter with him, and that it couldn't be helped."

"Where *is* our dear friend, Mr. Chuffey?" asked Pecksniff, looking round the chamber, and winking both his eyes at once—for he was overcome by his feelings.

But here he was interrupted by Mrs. Gamp, who, divested of her bonnet and shawl, came sidling and bridling into the room; and, with some sharpness, demanded a conference outside the door with Mr. Pecksniff.

"You may say whatever you wish to say here, Mrs. Gamp," said that gentleman, shaking his head with a melancholy expression.

"It is not much as I have to say, when people is a mourning for the dead and gone," said Mrs. Gamp; "but what I have to say is *to* the pint and purpose, and no offence intended, must be so considered. I have been at a many places in my time, gentlemen, and I hope I knows what my duties is, and how the same should be performed: in course, if I did not, it would be very strange, and very wrong in sich a gentleman as Mr. Mould, which has undertook the highest families in this land, and given every satisfaction, so to recommend me as he does. I have seen a deal of trouble my own self," said Mrs. Gamp, laying greater and greater stress upon her words, "and I can feel for them as has their feelings tried: but I am not a Rooshan or a Prooshan, and consequently cannot suffer Spies to be set over me."

Before it was possible that an answer could be returned, Mrs. Gamp, now growing redder in the face, went on to say:

"It is not a easy matter, gentlemen, to live when you are left a widder woman; particular when your feelings works upon you to that extent that you often find yourself a going out on terms which is a certain loss, and never can repay. But, in whatever way you earns your bread, you may have rules and regulations of your own, which cannot be broke through. Some people," said Mrs. Gamp, again entrenching herself behind her strong point, as if it were not assailable by human ingenuity, "may be Rooshans, and some may be Prooshans; they are born so, and will please themselves. Them which is of other naturs thinks different."

"If I understand this good lady," said Mr. Pecksniff, turning to Jonas, "Mr. Chuffey is troublesome to her. Shall I fetch him down?"

"Do," said Jonas. "I was going to tell you he was up there, when she came in. I'd go myself and bring him down, only—only I'd rather you went, if you don't mind it."

Mr. Pecksniff promptly departed, followed by Mrs. Gamp, who, seeing that he took a bottle and glass from the cupboard, and carried it in his hand, was much softened.

"I am sure," she said, "that if it was n't for his own happiness, I should no more mind his being there, poor dear, than if he was a fly. But them as is n't used to these things, thinks so much of 'em afterwards, that it's a kindness to 'em not to let 'em have their wish. And even," said Mrs. Gamp, probably in reference to some flowers of speech she had already strewn on Mr. Chuffey, "even if one calls 'em names. it's only done to rouse 'em."

Whatever epithets she had bestowed upon the old clerk, they had not roused *him*. He sat beside the bed, in the chair he had occupied all the previous night, with his hands folded before him, and his head bowed down; and neither looked up, on their entrance, nor gave any sign of consciousness, until Mr. Pecksniff took him by the arm, when he meekly rose.

"Three score and ten," said Chuffey, "ought and carry seven. Some men are so strong that they live to fourscore—four times ought's an ought, four times two's eight—eighty. Oh! why—why—why—didn't he live to four times ought's an ought, and four times two's eight—eighty?"

"Ah! what a wale of grief!" cried Mrs. Gamp, possessing herself of the bottle and glass.

"Why did he die before his poor old, crazy servant!" said Chuffey, clasping his hands and looking up in anguish. "Take him from me, and what remains?"

"Mr. Jonas," returned Pecksniff, "Mr. Jonas, my good friend."

"I loved him," cried the old man, weeping. "He was good to me. We learnt Tare and Tret together, at school. I took him down once, six boys, in the arithmetic class. God forgive me! Had I the heart to take him down!"

"Come, Mr. Chuffey," said Pecksniff, "come with me. Summon up your fortitude, Mr. Chuffey."

"Yes, I will," returned the old clerk. "Yes. I'll sum up my forty—How many time's forty—Oh, Chuzzlewit and Son—Your own son, Mr. Chuzzlewit; your own son, Sir!"

He yielded to the hand that guided him, as he lapsed into this familiar expression, and submitted to be led away. Mrs. Gamp, with the bottle on one knee, and the glass in the other, sat upon a stool, shaking her head for a long time, until, in a moment of abstraction, she poured out a dram of spirits, and raised it to her lips. It was succeeded by a second, and by a third, and then her eyes—either in the sadness of her reflections upon life and death, or in her admiration of the liquor—were so turned up as to be quite invisible. But she shook her head still.

Poor Chuffey was conducted to his accustomed corner, and there he remained, silent and quiet, save at long intervals, when he would rise, and walk about the room, and wring his hands, or raise some strange and sudden cry. For a whole week they all three sat about the hearth and never stirred abroad. Mr. Pecksniff would have walked out in the evening time, but Jonas was so averse to his being absent for a minute, that he abandoned the idea, and so, from morning until night, they brooded together in the dark room, without relief or occupation.

The weight of that which was stretched out stiff and stark, in the awful chamber above stairs, so crushed and bore down Jonas, that he bent beneath the load. During the whole long seven days and nights, he was always oppressed and haunted by a dreadful sense of Its presence in the house. Did the door move, he looked towards it with a livid face and starting eye, as if he fully believed that ghostly fingers clutched the handle. Did the fire flicker in a draught of

air, he glanced over his shoulder, as almost dreading to behold some shrouded figure fanning and flapping at it with its fearful dress. The lightest noise disturbed him ; and once, in the night, at the sound of a footstep over-head, he cried out that the dead man was walking—tramp, tramp, tramp—about his coffin.

He lay at night upon a mattress on the floor of the sitting-room ; his own chamber having been assigned to Mrs. Gamp ; and Mr. Pecksniff was similarly accommodated. The howling of a dog before the house, filled him with a terror he could not disguise. He avoided the reflection in the opposite windows of the light that burned above, as though it had been an angry eye. He often, in every night, rose up from his fitful sleep, and looked and longed for dawn ; all directions and arrangements, even to the ordering of their daily meals, he abandoned to Mr. Pecksniff. That excellent gentleman, deeming that the mourner wanted comfort, and that high-feeding was likely to do him infinite service, availed himself of these opportunities to such good purpose that they kept quite a dainty table during this melancholy season ; with sweetbreads, stewed kidneys, oysters, and other such light viands for supper every night ; over which, and sundry jorums of hot punch, Mr. Pecksniff delivered such moral reflections and spiritual consolation as might have converted a Heathen—especially if he had had but an imperfect acquaintance with the English tongue.

Nor did Mr. Pecksniff alone indulge in the creature comforts during this sad time. Mrs. Gamp proved to be very choice in her eating, and repudiated hashed mutton with scorn. In her drinking too, she was very punctual and particular, requiring a pint of mild porter at lunch, a pint at dinner, half a pint as a species of stay or holdfast between dinner and tea, and a pint of the celebrated staggering ale, or Real Old Brighton Tipper, at supper ; besides the bottle on the chimney-piece, and such casual invitations to refresh herself with wine as the good-breeding of her employers might prompt them to offer. In like manner, Mr. Mould's men found it necessary to drown their grief, like a young kitten in the morning of its existence ; for which reason they generally fuddled themselves before they began to do anything, lest it should make head and get the better of them. In short, the whole of that strange week was a round of dismal joviality and grim enjoyment ; and every one, except poor Chuffey, who came within the shadow of Anthony Chuzzlewit's grave, feasted like a Ghoul.

At length the day of the funeral, pious and truthful ceremony that it was, arrived. Mr. Mould, with a glass of generous port between his eye and the light, leaned against the desk in the little glass office with his gold watch in his unoccupied hand, and conversed with Mrs. Gamp ; two mutes were at the house-door, looking as mournful as could be reasonably expected of men with such a thriving job in hand ; the whole of Mr. Mould's establishment were on duty within the house or without ; feathers waved, horses snorted, silks and velvets fluttered ; in a word, as Mr. Mould emphatically said, "everything that money could do, was done."

"And what can do more, Mrs. Gamp?" exclaimed the undertaker, as he emptied his glass, and smacked his lips.

"Nothing in the world, sir."

"Nothing in the world," repeated Mr. Mould. "You are right, Mrs. Gamp. Why do people spend more money"—here he filled his glass again—"upon a death, Mrs. Gamp, than upon a birth? Come, that's in your way; you ought to know. How do you account for that now?"

"Perhaps it is because an undertaker's charges comes dearer than a nurse's charges, sir," said Mrs. Gamp, tittering, and smoothing down her new black dress with her hands.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Mould. "You have been breakfasting at somebody's expense this morning, Mrs. Gamp." But seeing, by the aid of a little shaving-glass which hung opposite, that he looked merry, he composed his features and became sorrowful.

"Many's the time that I've not breakfasted at my own expense along of your kind recommending, sir; and many's the time I hope to do the same in time to come," said Mrs. Gamp, with an apologetic curtsy.

"So be it," replied Mr. Mould, "please Providence. No, Mrs. Gamp; I'll tell you why it is. It's because the laying out of money with a well-conducted establishment, where the thing is performed upon the very best scale, binds the broken heart, and sheds balm upon the wounded spirit. Hearts want binding, and spirits want balm when people die: not when people are born. Look at this gentleman to-day; look at him."

"An open-handed gentleman!" cried Mrs. Gamp, with enthusiasm.

"No, no," said the undertaker; "not an open-handed gentleman in general, by any means. There you mistake him: but an afflicted gentleman, an affectionate gentleman, who knows what it is in the power of money to do, in giving him relief, and in testifying his love and veneration for the departed. It can give him," said Mr. Mould, waving his watch-chain slowly round and round, so that he described one circle after every item; "it can give him four horses to each vehicle; it can give him velvet trappings; it can give him drivers in cloth cloaks and top-boots; it can give him the plumage of the ostrich, dyed black; it can give him any number of walking attendants, drest in the first style of funeral fashion, and carrying batons tipped with brass; it can give him a handsome tomb; it can give him a place in Westminster Abbey itself, if he choose to invest it in such a purchase. Oh! do not let us say that gold is dross, when it can buy such things as these, Mrs. Gamp."

"But what a blessing, sir," said Mrs. Gamp, "that there are such as you, to sell or let 'em out on hire!"

"Ay, Mrs. Gamp, you are right," rejoined the undertaker. "We should be an honoured calling. We do good by stealth, and blush to have it mentioned in our little bills. How much consolation may I—even I"—cried Mr. Mould, "have diffused among my fellow-creatures by means of my four long-tailed prancers, never harnessed under ten pund ten!"

Mrs. Gamp had begun to make a suitable reply, when she was interrupted by the appearance of one of Mr. Mould's assistants—his chief mourner in fact—an obese person, with his waistcoat in closer connection with his legs than is quite reconcileable with the established ideas of grace;

with that cast of feature which is figuratively called a bottle-nose ; and with a face covered all over with pimples. He had been a tender plant once upon a time, but from constant blowing in the fat atmosphere of funerals, had run to seed.

"Well, Tacker," said Mr. Mould, "is all ready below?"

"A beautiful show, sir," rejoined Tacker. "The horses are prouder and fresher than ever I see 'em ; and toss their heads, they do, as if they knowed how much their plumes cost. One, two, three, four," said Mr. Tacker, heaping that number of black cloaks upon his left arm.

"Is Tom there, with the cake and wine?" asked Mr. Mould.

"Ready to come in at a moment's notice, sir," said Tacker.

"Then," rejoined Mr. Mould, putting up his watch, and glancing at himself in the little shaving-glass, that he might be sure his face had the right expression on it : "then I think we may proceed to business. Give me the paper of gloves, Tacker. Ah what a man he was ! Ah Tacker, Tacker, what a man he was !"

Mr. Tacker, who from his great experience in the performance of funerals, would have made an excellent pantomime actor, winked at Mrs. Gamp without at all disturbing the gravity of his countenance, and followed his master into the next room.

It was a great point with Mr. Mould, and a part of his professional tact, not to seem to know the doctor—though in reality they were near neighbours, and very often, as in the present instance, worked together. So he advanced to fit on his black kid gloves as if he had never seen him in all his life ; while the doctor, on his part, looked as distant and unconscious as if he had heard and read of undertakers, and had passed their shops, but had never before been brought into communication with one.

"Gloves, eh?" said the doctor. "Mr. Pecksniff, after you."

"I could n't think of it," returned Mr. Pecksniff.

"You are very good," said the doctor, taking a pair. "Well, sir, as I was saying—I was called up to attend that case at about half-past one o'clock. Cake and wine, eh ? which is port ? Thank you."

Mr. Pecksniff took some also.

"At about half-past one o'clock in the morning, sir," resumed the doctor, "I was called up to attend that case. At the first pull of the night-bell I turned out, threw up the window, and put out my head. Cloak, eh ? Don't tie it too tight. That'll do."

Mr. Pecksniff having been likewise inducted into a similar garment, the doctor resumed.

"And put out my head,—hat, eh ? My good friend, that is not mine. Mr. Pecksniff, I beg your pardon, but I think we have unintentionally made an exchange. Thank you. Well, sir, I was going to tell you"—

"We are quite ready," interrupted Mould in a low voice.

"Ready, eh?" said the doctor. "Very good. Mr. Pecksniff, I'll take an opportunity of relating the rest in the coach. It's rather curious. Ready, eh ? No rain, I hope?"

"Quite fair, sir," returned Mould.

"I was afraid the ground would have been wet," said the doctor, "for

my glass fell yesterday. We may congratulate ourselves upon our good fortune." But seeing by this time that Mr. Jonas and Chuffey were going out at the door, he put a white pocket-handkerchief to his face as if a violent burst of grief had suddenly come upon him, and walked down side by side with Mr. Pecksniff.

Mr. Mould and his men had not exaggerated the grandeur of the arrangements. They were splendid. The four hearse-horses especially, reared and pranced, and showed their highest action, as if they knew a man was dead, and triumphed in it. "They break us, drive us, ride us; ill treat, abuse, and maim us for their pleasure—But they die; Hurrah, they die!"

So through the narrow streets and winding city ways, went Anthony Chuzzlewit's funeral: Mr. Jonas glancing stealthily out of the coach-window now and then, to observe its effect upon the crowd; Mr. Mould as he walked along, listening with a sober pride to the exclamations of the bystanders; the doctor whispering his story to Mr. Pecksniff, without appearing to come any nearer the end of it; and poor old Chuffey sobbing unregarded in a corner. But he had greatly scandalised Mr. Mould at an early stage of the ceremony by carrying his handkerchief in his hat in a perfectly informal manner, and wiping his eyes with his knuckles. And as Mr. Mould himself had said already, his behaviour was indecent, and quite unworthy of such an occasion; and he never ought to have been there.

There he was, however; and in the churchyard there he was, also, conducting himself in a no less unbecoming manner, and leaning for support on Tacker, who plainly told him that he was fit for nothing better than a walking funeral. But Chuffey, Heaven help him! heard no sound but the echoes, lingering in his own heart, of a voice for ever silent.

"I loved him," cried the old man, sinking down upon the grave when all was done. "He was very good to me. Oh, my dear old friend and master!"

"Come, come, Mr. Chuffey," said the doctor, "this won't do; it's a clayey soil, Mr. Chuffey. You must n't, really."

"If it had been the commonest thing we do, and Mr. Chuffey had been a Bearer, gentlemen," said Mould, casting an imploring glance upon them, as he helped to raise him, "he could n't have gone on worse than this."

"Be a man, Mr. Chuffey," said Pecksniff.

"Be a gentleman, Mr. Chuffey," said Mould.

"Upon my word, my good friend," murmured the doctor, in a tone of stately reproof, as he stepped up to the old man's side, "this is worse than weakness. This is bad, selfish, very wrong, Mr. Chuffey. You should take example from others, my good sir. You forget that you were not connected by ties of blood with our deceased friend; and that he had a very near and very dear relation, Mr. Chuffey."

"Ay, his own son!" cried the old man, clasping his hands with remarkable passion. "His own, own, only son!"

"He's not right in his head, you know," said Jonas, turning pale. "You're not to mind anything he says. I should n't wonder if

he was to talk some precious nonsense. But don't you mind him, any of you. I don't. My father left him to my charge ; and whatever he says or does, that's enough. *I'll take care of him.*"

A hum of admiration rose from the mourners (including Mr. Mould and his merry men) at this new instance of magnanimity and kind-feeling on the part of Jonas. But Chuffey put it to the test no farther. He said not a word more, and being left to himself for a little while, crept back again to the coach.

It has been said that Mr. Jonas turned pale when the behaviour of the old clerk attracted general attention ; his discomposure, however, was but momentary, and he soon recovered. But these were not the only changes he had exhibited that day. The curious eyes of Mr. Pecksniff had observed that as soon as they left the house upon their mournful errand, he began to mend ; that as the ceremonies proceeded he gradually, by little and little, recovered his old condition, his old looks, his old bearing, his old agreeable characteristics of speech and manner, and became, in all respects, his old pleasant self. And now that they were seated in the coach on their return home ; and more when they got there, and found the windows open, the light and air admitted, and all traces of the late event removed ; he felt so well convinced that Jonas was again the Jonas he had known a week ago, and not the Jonas of the intervening time, that he voluntarily gave up his recently-acquired power without one faint attempt to exercise it, and at once fell back into his former position of mild and deferential guest.

Mrs. Gamp went home to the bird-fancier's, and was knocked up again that very night for a birth of twins ; Mr. Mould dined gaily in the bosom of his family, and passed the evening facetiously at his club ; the hearse, after standing for a long time at the door of a roystering public-house, repaired to its stables with the feathers inside and twelve red-nosed undertakers on the roof, each holding on by a dingy peg, to which, in times of state, a waving plume was fitted ; the various trappings of sorrow were carefully laid by in presses for the next hirer ; the fiery steeds were quenched and quiet in their stalls ; the doctor got merry with wine at a wedding-dinner, and forgot the middle of the story which had no end to it ; the pageant of a few short hours ago was written nowhere half so legibly as in the undertaker's books.

Not in the churchyard ? Not even there. The gates were closed ; the night was dark and wet ; and the rain fell silently, among the stagnant weeds and nettles. One new mound was there which had not been last night. Time, burrowing like a mole below the ground, had marked his track by throwing up another heap of earth. And that was all.

CHAPTER XX.

IS A CHAPTER OF LOVE.

"PECKSNIFF," said Jonas, taking off his hat, to see that the black crape band was all right; and finding that it was, putting it on again, complacently; "what do you mean to give your daughters when they marry?"

"My dear Mr. Jonas," cried the affectionate parent, with an ingenuous smile, "what a very singular inquiry!"

"Now, don't you mind whether it's a singular inquiry or a plural one," retorted Jonas, eyeing Mr. Pecksniff with no great favour, "but answer it, or let it alone. One or the other."

"Hum! The question, my dear friend," said Mr. Pecksniff, laying his hand tenderly upon his kinsman's knee, "is involved with many considerations. What would I give them? Eh?"

"Ah! what would you give 'em?" repeated Jonas.

"Why, that," said Mr. Pecksniff, "would naturally depend in a great measure upon the kind of husbands they might choose, my dear young friend."

Mr. Jonas was evidently disconcerted, and at a loss how to proceed. It was a good answer. It seemed a deep one, but such is the wisdom of simplicity!

"My standard for the merits I would require in a son-in-law," said Mr. Pecksniff, after a short silence, "is a high one. Forgive me, my dear Mr. Jonas," he added, greatly moved, "if I say that you have spoiled me, and made it a fanciful one; an imaginative one; a prismatically tinged one, if I may be permitted to call it so."

"What do you mean by that?" growled Jonas, looking at him with increased disfavour.

"Indeed, my dear friend," said Mr. Pecksniff, "you may well inquire. The heart is not always a royal mint, with patent machinery, to work its metal into current coin. Sometimes it throws it out in strange forms, not easily recognised as coin at all. But it is sterling gold. It has at least that merit. It is sterling gold."

"Is it?" grumbled Jonas, with a doubtful shake of the head.

"Ay!" said Mr. Pecksniff, warming with his subject, "it is. To be plain with you, Mr. Jonas, if I could find two such sons-in-law as you will one day make to some deserving man, capable of appreciating a nature such as yours, I would—forgetful of myself—bestow upon my daughters, portions reaching to the very utmost limit of my means."

This was strong language, and it was earnestly delivered. But who can wonder that such a man as Mr. Pecksniff, after all he had seen and heard of Mr. Jonas, should be strong and earnest upon such a theme; a theme that touched even the worldly lips of undertakers with the honey of eloquence!

Mr. Jonas was silent, and looked thoughtfully at the landscape. For they were seated on the outside of the coach, at the back, and were

travelling down into the country. He accompanied Mr. Pecksniff home for a few days' change of air and scene after his recent trials.

"Well," he said, at last, with captivating bluntness, "suppose you got one such son-in-law as me, what then?"

Mr. Pecksniff regarded him at first with inexpressible surprise; then gradually breaking into a sort of dejected vivacity, said:

"Then well I know whose husband he would be!"

"Whose?" asked Jonas, drily.

"My eldest girl's, Mr. Jonas," replied Pecksniff, with moistening eyes. "My dear Cherry's: my staff, my scrip, my treasure, Mr. Jonas. A hard struggle, but it is in the nature of things! I must one day part with her to a husband. I know it, my dear friend. I am prepared for it."

"Ecod! you've been prepared for that, a pretty long time, I should think," said Jonas.

Many have sought to bear her from me," said Mr. Pecksniff. "All have failed. 'I never will give my hand, papa,'—those were her words, 'unless my heart is won.' She has not been quite so happy as she used to be, of late. I don't know why."

Again Mr. Jonas looked at the landscape; then at the coachman; then at the luggage on the roof; finally, at Mr. Pecksniff.

"I suppose you'll have to part with the other one, some of these days?" he observed, as he caught that gentleman's eye.

"Probably," said the parent. "Years will tame down the wildness of my foolish bird, and then it will be caged. But Cherry, Mr. Jonas, Cherry—"

"Oh, ah!" interrupted Jonas. "Years have made her all right enough. Nobody doubts that. But you haven't answered what I asked you. Of course, you're not obliged to do it, you know, if you don't like. You're the best judge."

There was a warning sulkiness in the manner of this speech, which admonished Mr. Pecksniff that his dear friend was not to be trifled with or fenced off, and that he must either return a straight-forward reply to his question, or plainly give him to understand that he declined to enlighten him upon the subject to which it referred. Mindful in this dilemma of the caution old Anthony had given him almost with his latest breath, he resolved to speak to the point, and so told Mr. Jonas—enlarging upon the communication as a proof of his great attachment and confidence—that in the case he had put, to wit, in the event of such a man as he proposing for his daughter's hand, he would endow her with a fortune of four thousand pounds.

"I should sadly pinch and cramp myself to do so," was his fatherly remark; "but that would be my duty, and my conscience would reward me. For myself, my conscience is my bank. I have a trifle invested there—a mere trifle, Mr. Jonas—but I prize it as a store of value, I assure you."

The good man's enemies would have divided upon this question into two parties. One would have asserted without scruple that if Mr. Pecksniff's conscience were his bank, and he kept a running account there, he

must have overdrawn it beyond all mortal means of computation. The other would have contended that it was a mere fictitious form ; a perfectly blank book ; or one in which entries were only made with a peculiar kind of invisible ink to become legible at some indefinite time ; and that he never troubled it at all.

"It would sadly pinch and cramp me, my dear friend," repeated Mr. Pecksniff, "but Providence—perhaps I may be permitted to say a special Providence—has blessed my endeavours, and I could guarantee to make the sacrifice."

A question of philosophy arises here, whether Mr. Pecksniff had or had not good reason to say, that he was specially patronised and encouraged in his undertakings. All his life long he had been walking up and down the narrow ways and bye-places, with a hook in one hand and a crook in the other, scraping all sorts of valuable odds and ends into his pouch. Now, there being a special Providence in the fall of a sparrow, it follows (so Mr. Pecksniff might have reasoned, perhaps), that there must also be a special Providence in the alighting of the stone, or stick, or other substance which is aimed at the sparrow. And Mr. Pecksniff's hook, or crook, having invariably knocked the sparrow on the head and brought him down, that gentleman may have been led to consider himself as specially licensed to bag sparrows, and as being specially seised and possessed of all the birds he had got together. That many undertakings, national as well as individual—but especially the former—are held to be specially brought to a glorious and successful issue, which never could be so regarded on any other process of reasoning, must be clear to all men. Therefore the precedents would seem to show that Mr. Pecksniff had good argument for what he said, and might be permitted to say it, and did not say it presumptuously, vainly, or arrogantly, but in a spirit of high faith and great wisdom meriting all praise.

Mr. Jonas, not being much accustomed to perplex his mind with theories of this nature, expressed no opinion on the subject. Nor did he receive his companion's announcement with one solitary syllable, good, bad, or indifferent. He preserved this taciturnity for a quarter of an hour at least, and during the whole of that time appeared to be steadily engaged in subjecting some given amount to the operation of every known rule in figures ; adding to it, taking from it, multiplying it, reducing it by long and short division ; working it by the rule of three direct and inversed ; exchange or barter ; practice ; simple interest ; compound interest ; and other means of arithmetical calculation. The result of these labours appeared to be satisfactory, for when he did break silence, it was as one who had arrived at some specific result, and freed himself from a state of distressing uncertainty.

"Come, old Pecksniff!"—such was his jocose address, as he slapped that gentleman on the back, at the end of the stage—"let's have something!"

"With all my heart," said Mr. Pecksniff.

"Let's treat the driver," cried Jonas.

"If you think it won't hurt the man, or render him discontented with his station—certainly," faltered Mr. Pecksniff.

Jonas only laughed at this, and getting down from the coach-top with great alacrity, cut a cumbersome kind of caper in the road. After which, he went into the public-house, and there ordered spirituous drink to such an extent that Mr. Pecksniff had some doubts of his perfect sanity, until Jonas set them quite at rest by saying, when the coach could wait no longer :

"I've been standing treat for a whole week and more, and letting you have all the delicacies of the season. *You shall pay for this, Pecksniff.*" It was not a joke either, as Mr. Pecksniff at first supposed ; for he went off to the coach without further ceremony, and left his respected victim to settle the bill.

But Mr. Pecksniff was a man of meek endurance, and Mr. Jonas was his friend. Moreover, his regard for that gentleman was founded, as we know, on pure esteem, and a knowledge of the excellence of his character. He came out from the tavern with a smiling face, and even went so far as to repeat the performance, on a less expensive scale, at the next ale-house. There was a certain wildness in the spirits of Mr. Jonas (not usually a part of his character) which was far from being subdued by these means, and, for the rest of the journey, he was so very buoyant—it may be said, boisterous—that Mr. Pecksniff had some difficulty in keeping pace with him.

They were not expected—oh dear, no ! Mr. Pecksniff had proposed in London to give the girls a surprise, and had said he wouldn't write a word to prepare them on any account, in order that he and Mr. Jonas might take them unawares, and just see what they were doing, when they thought their dear papa was miles and miles away. As a consequence of this playful device, there was nobody to meet them at the finger-post, but that was of small consequence, for they had come down by the day coach, and Mr. Pecksniff had only a carpet-bag, while Mr. Jonas had only a portmanteau. They took the portmanteau between them, put the bag upon it, and walked off up the lane without delay : Mr. Pecksniff already going on tiptoe, as if, without this precaution, his fond children, being then at the distance of a couple of miles or so, would have some filial sense of his approach.

It was a lovely evening, in the spring-time of the year ; and in the soft stillness of the twilight, all nature was very calm and beautiful. The day had been fine and warm ; but at the coming on of night, the air grew cool, and in the mellowing distance, smoke was rising gently from the cottage chimneys. There were a thousand pleasant scents diffused around, from young leaves and fresh buds ; the cuckoo had been singing all day long, and was but just now hushed ; the smell of earth, newly-upturned—first breath of hope to the first labourer, after his garden withered—was fragrant in the evening breeze. It was a time when most men cherish good resolves, and sorrow for the wasted past : when most men, looking on the shadows as they gather, think of that evening which must close on all, and that to-morrow which has none beyond.

"Precious dull," said Mr. Jonas, looking about. "It's enough to make a man go melancholy mad."

"We shall have lights and a fire soon," observed Mr. Pecksniff.

"We shall need 'em by the time we get there," said Jonas. "Why the devil don't you talk? What are you thinking of?"

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Jonas," said Pecksniff with great solemnity, "my mind was running at that moment on our late dear friend, your departed father."

Mr. Jonas immediately let his burden fall, and said, threatening him with his hand:

"Drop that, Pecksniff!"

Mr. Pecksniff, not exactly knowing whether allusion was made to the subject or the portmanteau, stared at his friend in unaffected surprise.

"Drop it, I say!" cried Jonas, fiercely. "Do you hear? Drop it —now and for ever. You had better, I give you notice!"

"It was quite a mistake," urged Mr. Pecksniff, very much dismayed; "though I admit it was foolish. I might have known it was a tender string."

"Don't talk to me about tender strings," said Jonas, wiping his forehead with the cuff of his coat. "I'm not going to be crowed over by you, because I don't like dead company."

Mr. Pecksniff had got out the words "Crowed over, Mr. Jonas!" when that young man, with a dark expression in his countenance, cut him short once more:

"Mind!" he said, "I won't have it. I advise you not to revive the subject, neither to me nor anybody else. You can take a hint, if you choose, as well as another man. There's enough said about it. Come along!"

Taking up his part of the load again, when he had said these words, he hurried on so fast that Mr. Pecksniff, at the other end of the portmanteau, found himself dragged forward in a very inconvenient and ungraceful manner, to the great detriment of what is called by fancy gentlemen "the bark" upon his shins, which were most unmercifully bumped against the hard leather and the iron buckles. In the course of a few minutes, however, Mr. Jonas relaxed his speed, and suffered his companion to come up with him, and to bring the portmanteau into a tolerably straight position.

It was pretty clear that he regretted his late outbreak, and that he mistrusted its effect on Mr. Pecksniff; for as often as that gentleman glanced towards Mr. Jonas, he found Mr. Jonas glancing at him, which was a new source of embarrassment. It was but a short-lived one though, for Mr. Jonas soon began to whistle, whereupon Mr. Pecksniff, taking his cue from his friend, began to hum a tune melodiously.

"Pretty nearly there, ain't we?" said Jonas, when this had lasted some time.

"Close, my dear friend," said Mr. Pecksniff.

"What 'll they be doing, do you suppose?" asked Jonas.

"Impossible to say," cried Mr. Pecksniff. "Giddy truants! They may be away from home, perhaps. I was going to—he! he! he!—I was going to propose," said Mr. Pecksniff, "that we should enter by the back way, and come upon them like a clap of thunder, Mr. Jonas."

It might not have been easy to decide in respect of which of their manifold properties, Jonas, Mr. Pecksniff, the carpet-bag, and the port-manteau, could be likened to a clap of thunder. But Mr. Jonas giving his assent to this proposal, they stole round into the back yard, and softly advanced towards the kitchen window, through which the mingled light of fire and candle shone upon the darkening night.

Truly Mr. Pecksniff is blessed in his children—in one of them, at any rate. The prudent Cherry—staff, and scrip, and treasure of her doting father—there she sits, at a little table white as driven snow, before the kitchen fire, making up accounts! See the neat maiden, as with pen in hand, and calculating look addressed towards the ceiling, and bunch of keys within a little basket at her side, she checks the housekeeping expenditure! From flat-iron, dish-cover, and warming-pan; from pot and kettle, face of brass footman, and black-leaded stove; bright glances of approbation wink and glow upon her. The very onions dangling from the beam mantle and shine like cherubs' cheeks. Something of the influence of those vegetables sinks into Mr. Pecksniff's nature. He weeps.

It is but for a moment, and he hides it from the observation of his friend—very carefully—by a somewhat elaborate use of his pocket handkerchief, in fact: for he would not have his weakness known.

"Pleasant," he murmured—"pleasant to a father's feelings! My dear girl! Shall we let her know we are here, Mr. Jonas?"

"Why, I suppose you don't mean to spend the evening in the stable or the coach-house," he returned.

"That, indeed, is not such hospitality as I would show to *you*, my friend," cried Mr. Pecksniff, pressing his hand. And then he took a long breath, and tapping at the window, shouted with stentorian blandness:

"Boh!"

Cherry dropped her pen and screamed. But innocence is ever bold—or should be. As they opened the door, the valiant girl exclaimed in a firm voice, and with a presence of mind which even in that trying moment did not desert her, "Who are you? What do you want? Speak! or I will call my Pa."

Mr. Pecksniff held out his arms. She knew him instantly, and rushed into his fond embrace.

"It was thoughtless of us, Mr. Jonas, it was very thoughtless," said Pecksniff, smoothing his daughter's hair. "My darling, do you see that I am not alone!"

Not she. She had seen nothing but her father until now. She saw Mr. Jonas now, though; and blushed, and hung her head down, as she gave him welcome.

But where was Merry? Mr. Pecksniff didn't ask the question in reproach, but in a vein of mildness touched with a gentle sorrow. She was upstairs, reading on the parlour couch. Ah! Domestic details had no charm for *her*. "But call her down," said Mr. Pecksniff, with a placid resignation. "Call her down, my love."

She was called and came, all flushed and tumbled from reposing on

the sofa ; but none the worse for that. No, not at all. Rather the better, if anything.

"Oh my goodness me !" cried the arch girl, turning to her cousin when she had kissed her father on both cheeks, and in her frolicsome nature had bestowed a supernumerary salute upon the tip of his nose, "*you* here, fright ! Well, I'm very thankful that you won't trouble *me* much !"

"What ! you're as lively as ever, are you ?" said Jonas. "Oh ! You're a wicked one !"

"There, go along !" retorted Merry, pushing him away. "I'm sure I don't know what I shall ever do, if I have to see much of you. Go along, for gracious' sake !"

Mr. Pecksniff striking in here, with a request that Mr. Jonas would immediately walk up stairs, he so far complied with the young lady's adjuration as to go at once. But though he had the fair Cherry on his arm, he could not help looking back at her sister, and exchanging some further dialogue of the same bantering description, as they all four ascended to the parlour ; where—for the young ladies happened, by good fortune, to be a little later than usual that night—the tea-board was at that moment being set out.

Mr. Pinch was not at home, so they had it all to themselves, and were very snug and talkative, Jonas sitting between the two sisters, and displaying his gallantry in that engaging manner which was peculiar to him. It was a hard thing, Mr. Pecksniff said, when tea was done and cleared away, to leave so pleasant a little party, but having some important papers to examine in his own apartment, he must beg them to excuse him for half an hour. With this apology he withdrew, singing a careless strain as he went. He had not been gone five minutes, when Merry, who had been sitting in the window, apart from Jonas and her sister, burst into a half-smothered laugh, and skipped towards the door.

"Hollo !" cried Jonas. "Don't go."

"Oh, I dare say !" rejoined Merry, looking back. "You're very anxious I should stay, fright, ain't you ?"

"Yes, I am," said Jonas. "Upon my word I am. I want to speak to you." But as she left the room notwithstanding, he ran out after her, and brought her back, after a short struggle in the passage which scandalized Miss Cherry very much.

"Upon my word, Merry," urged that young lady, "I wonder at you ! There are bounds even to absurdity, my dear."

"Thank you my sweet," said Merry, pursing up her rosy lips. "Much obliged to it for its advice. Oh ! do leave me alone, you monster, do !" This entreaty was wrung from her by a new proceeding on the part of Mr. Jonas, who pulled her down, all breathless as she was, into a seat beside him on the sofa, having at the same time Miss Cherry upon the other side.

"Now," said Jonas, clasping the waist of each : "I have got both arms full, haven't I ?"

"One of them will be black and blue to-morrow, if you don't let me go," cried the playful Merry.

"Ah! I don't mind *your* pinching," grinned Jonas, "a bit."

"Pinch him for me, Cherry, pray," said Mercy. "I never did hate anybody so much as I hate this creature, I declare!"

"No, no, don't say that," urged Jonas, "and don't pinch either, because I want to be serious. I say—Cousin Charity—"

"Well! what?" she answered, sharply.

"I want to have some sober talk," said Jonas: "I want to prevent any mistakes, you know, and to put everything upon a pleasant understanding. That's desirable and proper, ain't it?"

Neither of the sisters spoke a word. Mr. Jonas paused and cleared his throat, which was very dry.

"She'll not believe what I'm going to say, will she cousin?" said Jonas, timidly squeezing Miss Charity.

"Really Mr. Jonas I don't know, until I hear what it is. It's quite impossible!"

"Why, you see," said Jonas, "her way always being to make game of people, I know she'll laugh, or pretend to—I know that, beforehand. But you can tell her I'm in earnest, cousin; can't you? You'll confess you know, won't you? You'll be honourable, I'm sure," he added persuasively.

No answer. His throat seemed to grow hotter and hotter, and to be more and more difficult of controul.

"You see, Cousin Charity," said Jonas, "nobody but you can tell her what pains I took to get into her company when you were both at the boarding-house in the city, because nobody's so well aware of it, you know. Nobody else can tell her how hard I tried to get to know you better, in order that I might get to know her without seeming to wish it; can they? I always asked you about her, and said where had she gone, and when would she come, and how lively she was, and all that; didn't I, cousin? I know you'll tell her so, if you have n't told her so already, and—and—I dare say you have, because I'm sure you're honourable, ain't you?"

Still not a word. The right arm of Mr. Jonas—the elder sister sat upon his right—may have been sensible of some tumultuous throbbing which was not within itself; but nothing else apprised him that his words had had the least effect.

"Even if you kept it to yourself, and have n't told her," resumed Jonas, "it don't much matter, because you'll bear honest witness now; won't you? We've been very good friends from the first; have n't we? and of course we shall be quite friends in future, and so I don't mind speaking before you a bit. Cousin Mercy, you've heard what I've been saying. She'll confirm it, every word; she must. Will you have me for your husband? Eh?"

As he released his hold of Charity, to put this question with better effect, she started up and hurried away to her own room, marking her progress as she went by such a train of passionate and incoherent sound, as nothing but a slighted woman in her anger could produce.

"Let me go away. Let me go after her," said Merry, pushing him off, and giving him—to tell the truth—more than one sounding slap upon his outstretched face.

"Not till you say yes. You have n't told me. Will you have me for your husband?"

"No, I won't. I can't bear the sight of you. I have told you so a hundred times. You are a fright. Besides, I always thought you liked my sister best. We all thought so."

"But that was n't my fault," said Jonas.

"Yes, it was : you know it was."

"Any trick is fair in love," said Jonas. "She may have thought I liked her best, but you did n't."

"I did!"

"No, you did n't. You never could have thought I liked her best, when you were by."

"There's no accounting for tastes," said Merry; "at least I did n't mean to say that. I don't know what I mean. Let me go to her."

"Say 'Yes,' and then I will."

"If I ever brought myself to say so, it should only be, that I might hate and tease you all my life."

"That's as good," cried Jonas, "as saying it right out. It's a bargain, cousin. We're a pair, if ever there was one."

This gallant speech was succeeded by a confused noise of kissing and slapping; and then the fair, but much dishevelled Merry, broke away, and followed in the footsteps of her sister.

Now, whether Mr. Pecksniff had been listening—which in one of his character appears impossible: or divined almost by inspiration what the matter was—which, in a man of his sagacity is far more probable: or happened by sheer good fortune to find himself in exactly the right place, at precisely the right time—which, under the special guardianship in which he lived might very reasonably happen: it is quite certain that at the moment when the sisters came together in their own room, he appeared at the chamber door. And a marvellous contrast it was—they so heated, noisy, and vehement; he so calm, so self-possessed, so cool and full of peace, that not a hair upon his head was stirred.

"Children!" said Mr. Pecksniff, spreading out his hands in wonder, but not before he had shut the door, and set his back against it. "Girls! Daughters! What is this?"

"The wretch; the apostate; the false, mean, odious villain; has before my very face proposed to Mercy!" was his elder daughter's answer.

"Who has proposed to Mercy?" said Mr. Pecksniff.

"*He* has. That thing. Jonas, down stairs."

"Jonas proposed to Mercy!" said Mr. Pecksniff. "Aye, aye! Indeed!"

"Have you nothing else to say?" cried Charity. "Am I to be driven mad, papa? He has proposed to Mercy, not to me."

"Oh, fie! For shame!" said Mr. Pecksniff, gravely. "Oh, for shame! Can the triumph of a sister move you to this terrible display, my child? Oh, really this is very sad! I am sorry; I am surprised and hurt to see you so. Mercy, my girl, bless you! See to her. Ah, envy, envy, what a passion you are!"

Uttering this apostrophe in a tone full of grief and lamentation, Mr. Pecksniff left the room (taking care to shut the door behind him), and

walked down stairs into the parlour. There he found his intended son-in-law, whom he seized by both hands.

"Jonas!" cried Mr. Pecksniff, "Jonas! the dearest wish of my heart is now fulfilled!"

"Very well; I'm glad to hear it," said Jonas. "That'll do. I say, as it ain't the one you're so fond of, you must come down with another thousand, Pecksniff. You must make it up five. It's worth that to keep your treasure to yourself, you know. You get off very cheap that way, and have n't a sacrifice to make."

The grin with which he accompanied this, set off his other attractions to such unspeakable advantage, that even Mr. Pecksniff lost his presence of mind for the moment, and looked at the young man as if he were quite stupified with wonder and admiration. But he quickly regained his composure, and was in the very act of changing the subject, when a hasty step was heard without, and Tom Pinch, in a state of great excitement, came darting into the room.

On seeing a stranger there, apparently engaged with Mr. Pecksniff in private conversation, Tom was very much abashed, though he still looked as if he had something of great importance to communicate, which would be a sufficient apology for his intrusion.

"Mr. Pinch," said Pecksniff, "this is hardly decent. You will excuse my saying that I think your conduct scarcely decent, Mr. Pinch."

"I beg your pardon, sir," replied Tom, "for not knocking at the door."

"Rather beg this gentleman's pardon, Mr. Pinch," said Pecksniff. "I know you; he does not.—My young man, Mr. Jonas."

The son-in-law that was to be gave him a slight nod—not actively disdainful or contemptuous, only passively: for he was in a good humour.

"Could I speak a word with you, sir, if you please?" said Tom. "It's rather pressing."

"It should be very pressing to justify this strange behaviour, Mr. Pinch," returned his master. "Excuse me for one moment, my dear friend. Now, sir, what is the reason of this rough intrusion?"

"I am very sorry, sir, I am sure," said Tom, standing, cap in hand, before his patron in the passage: "and I know it must have a very rude appearance—"

"It *has* a very rude appearance, Mr. Pinch."

"Yes, I feel that, sir; but the truth is, I was so surprised to see them, and knew you would be too, that I ran home very fast indeed, and really had n't enough command over myself to know what I was doing very well. I was in the church just now, sir, touching the organ for my own amusement, when I happened to look round, and saw a gentleman and lady standing in the aisle listening. They seemed to be strangers, sir, as well as I could make out in the dusk: and I thought I did n't know them: so presently I left off, and said, would they walk up into the organ-loft, or take a seat? No, they said, they would n't do that; but they thanked me for the music they had heard—in fact," observed Tom, blushing—"they said, 'Delicious music!' at least, *she* did; and I am sure that was a greater pleasure and honour to me, than any com-

pliment I could have had. I—I—beg your pardon, sir;” he was all in a tremble, and dropped his hat for the second time; “but I—I’m rather flurried, and I fear I’ve wandered from the point.”

“If you will come back to it, Thomas,” said Mr. Pecksniff, with an icy look, “I shall feel obliged.”

“Yes, sir,” returned Tom, “certainly. They had a posting carriage at the porch, sir, and had stopped to hear the organ, they said, and then they said—*she* said, I mean, ‘I believe you live with Mr. Pecksniff, sir?’ I said I had that honour, and I took the liberty, sir,” added Tom, raising his eyes to his benefactor’s face, “of saying, as I always will and must, with your permission, that I was under great obligations to you, and never could express my sense of them sufficiently.”

“That,” said Mr. Pecksniff, “was very, very wrong. Take your time Mr. Pinch.”

“Thank you, sir,” cried Tom. “On that they asked me—she asked, I mean—‘Wasn’t there a bridle-road to Mr. Pecksniff’s house,—’

Mr. Pecksniff suddenly became full of interest.

“‘Without going by the Dragon?’ When I said there was, and said how happy I should be to show it ’em, they sent the carriage on by the road, and came with me across the meadows. I left ’em at the turnstile to run forward and tell you they were coming, and they’ll be here, sir, in—in less than a minute’s time, I should say,” added Tom, fetching his breath with difficulty.

“Now who,” said Mr. Pecksniff, pondering, “who may these people be!”

“Bless my soul, sir!” cried Tom, “I meant to mention that at first I thought I had. I knew them—her, I mean—directly. The gentleman who was ill at the Dragon, sir, last winter; and the young lady who attended him.”

Tom’s teeth chattered in his head, and he positively staggered with amazement, at witnessing the extraordinary effect produced on Mr. Pecksniff by these simple words. The dread of losing the old man’s favour almost as soon as they were reconciled, through the mere fact of having Jonas in the house; the impossibility of dismissing Jonas, or shutting him up, or tying him hand and foot and putting him in the coal-cellar, without offending him beyond recall; the horrible discordance prevailing in the establishment, and the impossibility of reducing it to decent harmony, with Charity in loud hysterics, Mercy in the utmost disorder, Jonas in the parlour, and Martin Chuzzlewit and his young charge upon the very door-steps; the total hopelessness of being able to disguise or feebly explain this state of rampant confusion; the sudden accumulation over his devoted head of every complicated perplexity and entanglement—for his extrication from which he had trusted to time, good fortune, chance, and his own plotting—so filled the entrapped architect with dismay, that if Tom could have been a Gorgon staring at Mr. Pecksniff, and Mr. Pecksniff could have been a Gorgon staring at Tom, they could not have horrified each other half so much as in their own bewildered persons.

“Dear, dear!” cried Tom, “what have I done? I hoped it would be a pleasant surprise, sir. I thought you would like to know.”

But at that moment a loud knocking was heard at the hall-door.

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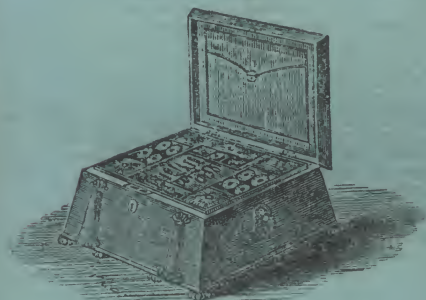
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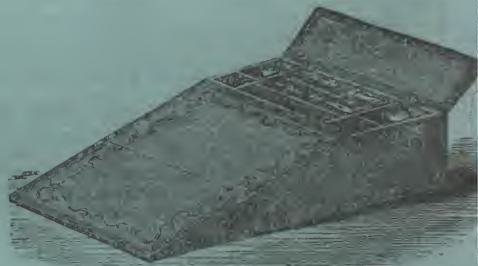
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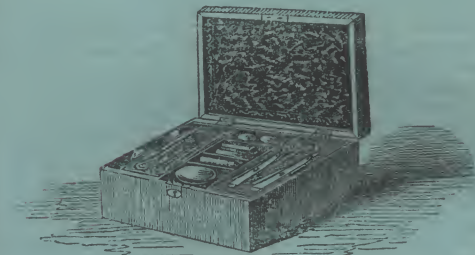
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